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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: MUSLIM PARTY SUPPORTS DE-MERGER OF  
NORTH AND EAST

REF: A. COLOMBO 1706

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1601

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Ambassador met December 11 with representatives of the All Ceylon Muslim Congress (ACMC), including Minister of Disaster Relief Services M.S.S. Ameer. The ACMC split from Rauf Hakeem's Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) (ref b) to support the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), although its platform does not differ significantly from the SLMC, which is allied with the opposition United National Party (UNP). The ACMC accused Rauf Hakeem of being more concerned with "impressing high-level people" than pursuing Muslim interests.

[1](#)2. (C) Like Hakeem's SLMC, the ACMC believes that Muslims, the vast majority of whom are Tamil-speakers, should nevertheless have an independent role from Tamils in the peace process. Unlike Hakeem, who has not taken a firm public stand on the Supreme Court's October 30 decision that the 1987 merger of the predominantly Tamil-speaking north and east provinces without a referendum was unconstitutional (ref a), the ACMC supports the de-merger. Muslims are more numerous than either Tamils or Sinhalese in the eastern province, argued Ameer, whereas they became a minority to the Tamils when the north and east provinces were merged.

[1](#)3. (C) Minister Ameer respectfully criticized the United States and the Co-Chairs for characterizing the Supreme Court's "untimely" de-merger decision as a stumbling block to the peace process. The ACMC believes that, on the contrary, the de-merger should stand as a prerequisite for resuming the peace process. The Ambassador explained that the United States and the Co-chairs are trying to avoid steps that make it more difficult to engage the parties in peace talks. He added that we have no intention of supporting the exclusion of Muslims from an equitable political settlement. The ACMC members expressed interest in studying "America's federal system" as a model for a Sri Lankan solution, hopefully through a USG-funded study tour.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: Although Sri Lanka's Muslim parties have political, and sometimes personal, differences among themselves, they share a common fear that a negotiated solution will render them an oppressed minority within another minority group, the Tamils. They also resent that Tamil militant movements, in contrast to the Muslim

community's political and mainly peaceful approach, have sidelined Muslim aspirations. The Muslim parties have an important role to play in the peace process; it is in our interest as well to make sure that they establish a place at the negotiating table and remain a voice of calm reason in a region that can ill afford another extremist movement.

BLAKE